

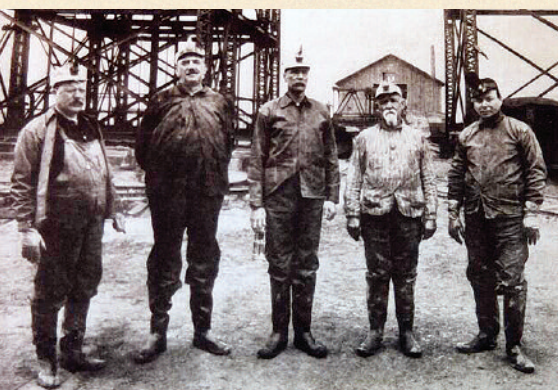
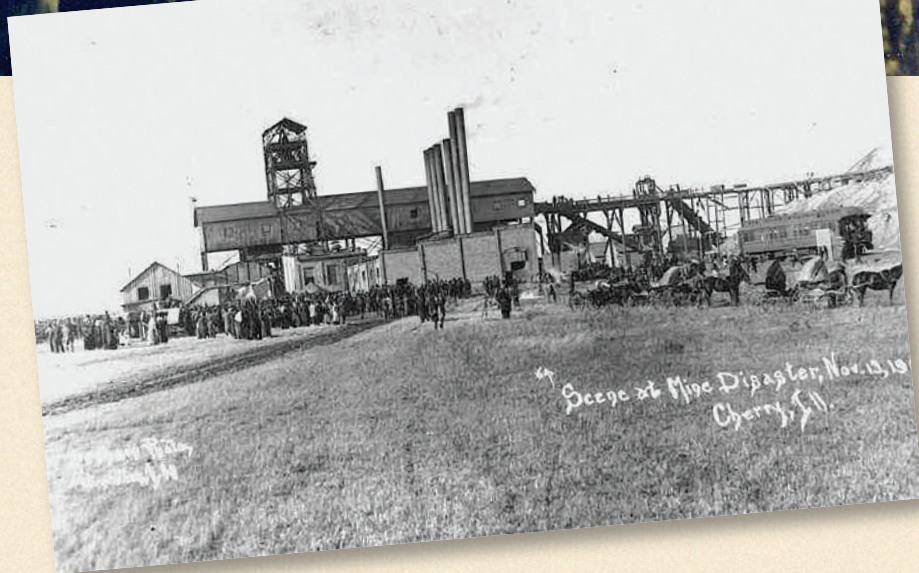
One-hundred years ago this month, 259 miners lost their lives in what remains the nation's third largest mine disaster.

Cherry Mine Disaster



Story By Kathy Andrews
Photos Courtesy Ray Tutaj, Jr.

The morning of Saturday, November 13, 1909 started like any other in the Bureau County community of Cherry, with 481 men and boys descending deep underground to work for Cherry Coal Mine Company.



The day after the Cherry Mine fire began, crowds gathered at the surface waiting on news. A team of state mine inspectors (left) assessed the situation.

Workers at the 4-year-old mine, owned by St. Paul Coal Company, mined 1,500 tons daily with pick and shovel.

Because the electrical system was down at the time, the mine was lit with kerosene lamps. A car load of hay, lowered daily to feed the 70 mules stabled underground, was parked under a lighted oil torch, and shortly after 1 p.m., the hay caught fire.

Thinking it would be extinguished in the lowest level of the mine, men pushed the burning car to the escapement hatch

